Requirements for Participatory Framework on Governmental Policy Level

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Abstract

The article seeks to specify the requirements of the framework for public participation in policy making on the governmental level aiming to elaborate a substantial content of the participatory policy. The research methodology engages both qualitative and quantitative approaches based on document analysis and interviews. We analysed a range of documents, issued by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, where participatory groups are nominated for the annual terms of 2007 and 2010. Results of the research testify that, notwithstanding the considerable number of participatory facts, public administrators hold more than a half of the places in the participatory groups. Stakeholders other than public administrators are considered to be rather consultants than partners in policy development. We suggest that for a substantial, effective and efficient participation framework, several requirements should be met including a correct arena for stakes' expression; completeness of the stake representation; balanced stake representation; sensitivity to research based evidence; monitoring and evaluation of participation quality.

Keywords: interest representation, stakeholders, participatory framework, policy making

JEL Classification: D71, D73

1. Introduction

Participation as one of democratic values and as a prerequisite for democracy has different forms. The variety of the forms, the extent of application, its efficiency and results depend on a state's historical context, traditions of democracy, political culture, practices of governance and a range of other important circumstances. Although voting is the most common and largely accepted form of democracy, the possibly to elect public officials and to delegate them the right to represent interests of citizens is no longer a sufficient way for political engagement. More instruments for political engagement are required in order to create significant and effective relationships between citizens and their elected representatives. Other possible instruments to enhance the participation including referendums, social polls, public meetings, comments and suggestions for decision projects, public debates, citizen's boards and juries etc. can be initiated and used either by officials or citizens (Koontz, 1999; Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005; Fishkin, 2009). However from this list, only referendums ensure the *vox populi* will be accounted in an actual decision-making process, while other instruments do not make certain the public volition anchors in the process. Although the responsibility for decisions of policy adoption belongs to politicians under the support of a public administration (PA) entity, the citizens play an important role in policy shaping (Haruta and Radu, 2010). Such interaction strives for better decisions that are supported by the public (Creighton, 2005). However some risk along with numerous possibilities for citizen participation could be emphasized. The participation may backfire, creating more hostility toward government; control over decision-making may be lost; a bad decision that is politically impossible to

ignore could be made (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). Therefore the framework reducing expression of that risk would be instrumentally managed by adjusting existing policy designing strategies to new societal demands of participation.

Since policies are elaborated and implemented at an operational level of governance, i.e. ministries or local authorities, it is important to ensure access for the public to the political processes at this level. Namely, public opinions, aspirations concerning relevant problems and modes of their solutions are required. Therefore our paper aims to substantiate the requirements of public participation at the governmental policy making level in order to elaborate a substantial content of participatory policy. The scope of the research is targeted at the attributes of an actionable participatory framework applied by policy makers.

2. Conceptual Framework for Stakeholder Participation in Policy

The framework of participation at the government level has to integrate information sharing mechanisms and a possibility to reflect the process and the best evidence available. The values of "non-corruptibility, responsibility to the civil society and ability to guarantee stability" (Stockemer *et al*, 2010) are the driven factors of good democratic governance and stimulate response to the requirements of participation engagement. The practice of extensive participation policy as a higher level of good governance proved to have impact on the economy as a consequence of targeted persuasion of government.

Different attitudes towards stakeholder engagement are discussed by scholars. Participatory and deliberative approach distinguishes four main principles used for the evolution of engagement quality (Ozanne *et al*, 2009; Corus *et al*, 2012): those stakeholders that will be affected by new policy have the normative validity to participate and give their input to policy; stakeholders are authorized to participate in dialogical validity; the dialog can be ensured by substantial deliberative process; outcome validity refers to the meeting "diverse needs of the participants" (Corus *et al*, 2012).
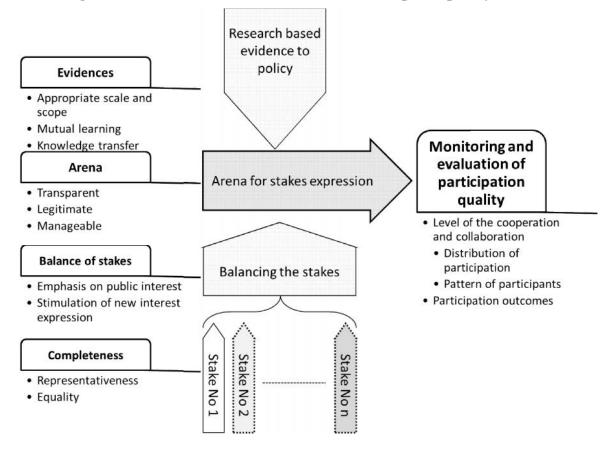
Attributes of actionable participatory framework. Taken into account the values of good governance and deliberative democracy approach, the following attributes for a participatory framework at governmental level could be proposed (Figure 1). The participatory framework has to:
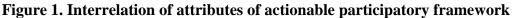
- indicate a transparent, legal and manageable correct arena for stakes' expression – any stakes could be expressed via the same entrance to the policy arena and should be analysed using the same procedure.
- control completeness of the stake representation during the policy process – the model should make sure that all possible stakes (supportive and confronting) are engaged;
- seek balanced stake representation (to let decrease the expression of the clear and powerful stakes among emerging new and not yet conceptualised stakes (public interest mostly). The clear emphasis on the public interest among other stakeholder interests has to be made;
- highlight the research based evidence and underline the right manageable point to empower its impact;

- ▪ evaluate the policy making practice in terms of participation quality. We discuss a participatory model that primarily helps to make a policy output and additionally could be valuable to evaluate policy results by means of qualitative interest representation.

Even though all requirements are interrelated, each has several particular features, thus every individual requirement is analysed separately.

The arena for stakes' expression is represented by transparency, legitimacy and manageability. Those components are integrated by good governance and are consolidated by democratic institutions that support the engagement process. A *transparent* arena for expression of interests allows getting things out in the open, hidden agendas are bound. Preconceived constraints to the process of policy development, outcomes, benefits and an analytical approach are communicated publicly. All interests have equal possibilities to enter the process, and process managers strive that decisions are aligned as much as possible (Mendonca *et al*, 2009). *Legitimacy* is expressed by establishing common ground for treatment of interests. An engagement process is guided by appointed public administrators (hereinafter PAs) who safeguard unique "entry points" for interest to be introduced in policy agenda (Michelsand De Graaf, 2010). Such scheme is needed to prevent that the most powerful interests prevail over other less powerful stakes. A *manageable* arena for stakes' expression ensures that stakeholders are selected carefully and involved timely, and during the engagement process policy actors are working towards an agreement. Realistic scopes, time and resources are needed to achieve sound manageability. Commitment of all policy actors could be built by running good processes.

Figure 1. Interrelation of attributes of actionable participatory framework

Completeness of stakes' representation could be characterised by representativeness and equality. *Representativeness* means a requirement to include as many interests as possible, representing different approaches and avoiding fragmentation. A proper stakeholder analysis and contact search are essential. Beware of thinking that if one does not know some stakeholders or considers they may be difficult to deal with such interests could be unacknowledged (Creighton, 2005). *Equality* calls to treat stakeholders without discrimination. Standing upon values and principles for fair decisions not only supportive but confronting interests have to be engaged and considered equally (Michels, and De Graaf, 2010).

The balance of stakes' representation is represented by such categories as an emphasis on the public interest, stimulation of new and not yet conceptualised interests, and reduction of the expression of the clear and powerful stakes. *An emphasis on the public interest* could be characterized by selecting participants who are not just standing for narrow demands but represent a wider constituency. Those representing public interest should be valued prior to those who are self-nominated. *Stimulation of new and not yet conceptualised interests* is important as such kind of faintly expressed interests could cover clues on the rising policy problems. Thus stimulation of those new interests could be seen as a preventive measure for future problems. It is necessary to ensure that those do not cover other less significant even less up-front interests. That helps to implement the principle of equality.

Research based evidence could be detailed toned for mutual learning and appropriate scale and scope. *An appropriate scale and scope* represents endeavour to balance expert knowledge and interests while introducing them into policy making process. Timely prepared and communicated policy evidence motivates to take into account decision impact evidences (Head, 2010). *Knowledge transfer* is described as an interactive exchange of knowledge between the researcher as a knowledge generator and other stakeholders who are going to use it or exploit it (Mitton *et al*, 2007). *Mutual learning* means that all policy actors are expected to be prepared to step back from their own position and listen to hard research based evidence. Thus during the interaction everyone has something to learn.

Monitoring and evaluation of participation quality could be characterised by the level of cooperation and collaboration between policy actors, and outcomes of participation. *The level of cooperation and collaboration between policy actors* explains that participatory processes should be based on searching of mutually agreeable solutions but not prescribed ones (Lukensmeyer *et al*, 2006). *Outcomes of participation* represent the contribution of stakeholders to policy development and indicate if policy makers are committed to the results generated with stakeholders.

3. Methodology

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to investigate stakeholders' involvement and participation management at the governmental policy making level. The data were collected at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter Ministry). The quantitative research employed an analysis of ministerial documents. We analysed documents, issued by the Ministry that nominated participatory groups during annual periods of 2007 and 2010. We selected all

decrees, 162 in total, that approve establishment of temporary structures. Those particular years were chosen as the middle terms of the cadencies of Lithuanian governments when those operated in the most stable manner. The document analysis enabled to trace the aims of application of participatory instruments and characteristics of engaged stakeholders. The data were classified according to participation target (temporary participatory group, commission, and council), participation goals (problems to be solved) and stakeholders' characteristics (sector, type of organization each participant represents).

Qualitative interviews were applied to research policy actors' attitudes towards participation content based on their experience of participation at the operational level of policy outlining. Interviews were conducted in January-March, 2012 with 11 individuals engaged in participatory groups. The policy actors with different affiliation were intentionally selected for interviewing. 7 respondents were PAs from Ministry, 3 – researchers, and 1 respondent – a representative of an association. All interviewed PAs are experienced in adoption of participatory instruments as each of them affirms being involved in groups with stakeholders periodically more than 5 times every year. Those respondents benefit recognition of their attitudes towards stakeholders' involvement in terms of willingness, intentions and process to employ stakeholders in policy outlining.

4. Expression of the participatory framework at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania

Analysis of legal documents issued by Ministry demonstrates that stakeholders are recognised as policy actors and a certain arena for introduction of interests into policy is developed. During this year, 65 of such groups were created, along with 28 commissions and 5 councils, whereas participatory groups were employed more than twice as less in 2010. We have counted 64 participatory instruments applied in total: 29 participatory groups, 25 commissions, and 10 councils employed in 2010. Using those instruments, 985 individuals were officially involved during 2007 and 2010 (686 – in 2007, and 441 – in 2010). Some participants were involved more than once as we have identified 1743 facts of participation in 2007 and 2010, i.e. each person of the 985 has been engaged in 1.77 groups on average. The analysis is broken down into participation components.

An arena for stakes' expression. The data clearly demonstrate that informal communication is valued by PAs more than application of formal participatory instruments. Employment of formal participatory groups is considered as an additional and time consuming workload requiring significant contribution. Consequently an informal way of dealing with stakeholders vaguely ensures equal possibilities for stakeholders to enter the policy process (Table 1).

Interviewees other than PAs are critical towards the developed arena for stakes' expression. On the one hand, scientists claim they expected practices of public engagement open for the society to be applied more widely involving citizens at early stages of policy development. On the other hand the interviewees stated the nature of choosing stakeholders to be occasionally engaged into process and driven by PAs willingness, but not by objective construct of possible interests in issues to be resolved by the participatory group.

Completeness of stakes' representation. Analysing completeness of stakes'

representation we found that more than a half (55 per cent and 56 per cent in 2007 and 2010 respectively) of policy actors represent the PA sector.

Apart from PAs, the stakeholders with the most extensive involvement are representatives of universities (33 per cent and 31 per cent in 2007 and 2010 respectively). Together with other higher education and research institutions (colleges, research institutions and etc.) they made 47 per cent and 43 per cent in 2007 and 2010 respectively of participation facts other than those of PAs (Figure 2). Stakeholders representing interests of schools, teachers, and pupils are counted to possess 21 per cent of participatory facts each year. The remaining types of stakeholders were involved in less than 12 per cent of participation facts each.

Table 1. Attributes of arena for stakes' expression

Characteristics	*Attributes*	*Quotation of participants' perceptions and experiences*
Transparency	Lack of transparency	…Who dominates? Personalities. We keep a "data base" of names in minds from where we select whom to involve. The real data base is unnecessary as the constant change of personalities continues. There is nothing non-transparent as it is an ordinary practice. Those who like expressing their ideas have possibilities to present them via public consultations… (PA2*)
	Right to be engaged is restricted to PA's knowledge	…Mostly we apply informal participatory instruments or use permanently functioning representational structures. Formal problem solution or decision making groups are employed under policy makers' orders. The latter propose candidates to be engaged…(PA7)
		…It happens that via informal communication I find out a decision group is going to be formed, thus I ask to be involved. Mainly I need to constantly follow myself what is on the scene… (S1, association)
	Openness to be engaged	
Legitimacy	Comprehensiveness of acting in lack of legitimacy framework	…Commitments for informal decision making groups are different for formal ones, therefore it is easier to act informally... (PA2)
		…When communicating informally you just need to contact and you will have things done, however this way lacks legitimacy… (PA5)
	Ignoring the official decision making procedures and hierarchy	…Currently we communicate mostly with the top management of the ministry rather than with public officials administrating participatory instruments. That is what the top managers prefer… (S2, university)
		…A decision making process has to be performed in several stages. A policy has to be shaped not only in a top-down manner but along with bottom-up flow involving the public in early stages… (S3, expert)
Manageability	Difficulties to manage knowledge	…Decisions when participatory groups are employed never are prompt, inputs exceed results… (PA5)
		…All participatory groups I was involved have a common imperfection. At the start we are not provided with initial data on the issues to be solved. What the problems are, their extents, what demands prevail, preliminary stakeholders' opinions, and other information could serve as a ground for further analysis of issues… (S3, expert)

* The code for interviewee's identification. PA – public administrator, S – involved stakeholder, number indicates an individual interviewee's code.
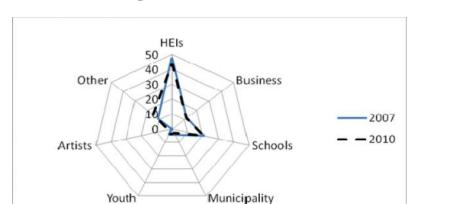
Figure 2. The composition of participated policy actors other than public administrators (in per cent)

The quantitative data as well as interview results show that participants are usually selected purposefully using an existing network of actors (Table 2). Some interviewed PAs admit that the participatory process lacks representativeness because of time limits dedicated for problems solution and a thorough stakeholder analysis is an excess and obstructs the decision making process. However almost all PAs stress that they treated all participants equally. Those involved actors with affiliations of organizations are concerned about cases when they were intentionally excluded from the process of policy making.

Table 2. Attributes of completeness of stakes representation

Characteristics	*Attributes*	*Quotation of participants' perceptions and experiences*
Representa-tiveness	Lack of representation	…Very often non-ministerial participants are just several experts with doubtful affiliations, maybe some project managers… (PA2)
	Non transparent approach to representation (advise searching)	…If necessary and if interested expert personalities are known in advance, we just ask an expert hosted organisation to nominate a familiar person… (PA5)
	High ability of representation	…I represent member organizations of an association I work in, but not myself. Therefore I call those organizations back to clarify their attitudes towards analysed issues… (S1, association)
	Pure appreciation of self-representation possibilities	…I represent myself and my knowledge on particular issues…(S3, expert)
Equality	Equality is conceptualised as necessary component but not operationalized	…We must work with everybody even those who are not able to discuss. The more soothe are experts, specialists in certain field and they possess the required knowledge. We meet and argue if need, still debates are relevant to issues…(PA1)
	Equality is not respected	…On an occasion decisions are made unilaterally. Some regulations are issued without our involvement even our interest is obvious…(S1, association)

The balance of stakes' representation. The Ministry employed participatory groups to solve issues of different complexity, importance and extent. More than a half of them in 2007, and 42 per cent in 2010 were delegated to work with issues having a strategic impact. For 39 per cent of the participatory groups, goals of administrative character were set. 5 per cent in 2007, and 8 per cent in 2010 were committed to ongoing reforms (when more than one issue is concerned and the whole sector is affected). The rest of participatory groups (3 per cent and 10 per cent in 2007 and 2010 respectively) focused on internal issues of the Ministry. Participatory groups of the strategic type were the most attributed to the public interest. In the second place of those invited to solve nationally or internationally relevant problems were institutions providing services in education and science (universities, colleges, schools and etc.). Such involved stakeholders make more than 30 per cent each year and only one tenth of the participation facts involved individuals from structures representing different groups or institutions (employees, employers, consumers etc.). Such data suggest that some efforts to introduce interests and stimulate new and not yet conceptualised interests are made at the governmental policy making level. However PAs admit that stakeholders with faintly expressed stakes are hardly to be involved and only sound interests launch efficient participatory process (Table 3). Some policy actors suggest that for the public interest to be better introduced into policy making participatory instruments should be applied more widely. There were only few occasions when the power of policy makers was applied to support or reduce some interests. On the other hand there are lots of positive experiences when participatory groups sought to balance diverse stakes in a correct and representing public interest manner.

Table 3. Attributes of balance of stakes representation

Characteristics	*Attributes*	*Quotation of participants' perceptions and experiences*
Emphasis on the public interest	Lack consideration about public interest	…There is little what stakeholders can do for policy designing process as each is concerned only about their own demands and only those represent… (PA1)
	Openness to be engaged	…The main factors for effective participation could be: involvement of more stakeholders; engagement of citizens not at the end of policy development but during the whole process; and evidence based decisions… (S3, expert)
Stimulation of new and not yet conceptualised interests	Self-protection (available practice justification)	…Researchers are not interested in ministerial activities. Those concerned about new schemes learn about them independently… (PA1)
	Interest competition	…It happens that in searches of agreement the demand of an interest represented by more powerful and skilled persons wins in front of others not so well conceptualised stakes… (PA3)
	Lack of representation abilities	…Group members, who experienced pressure, usually seize expressing their point of view as they understand the ministry needs no competing opinions… (S3, expert)

Research based evidence. Composition of the participatory groups when the main policy actors except for PAs are university representatives may well support to the idea that policy makers should seek expert advice. Generally those interviewees recognize public

involvement mostly as consulting experts they are familiar with. Although there is no role assignment in the groups in advance, some of involved actors take up the position that they are invited to the policy process for expertise, but not for representation of particular interests. Eventually they recognize that practices where only experts are involved are faulty in terms of completeness of stakes representation. However a research based evidence as a full meaning of this paradigm is necessary but not the one that can have impact on the decision making.

The investigation of the dynamics of Ministry engaged policy actors clearly indicates that expertise turns to shield the interest representation added value and puts in competition between stakes representation and PAs for negotiation. On the other hand, universities as research institution could have the stakes needed to be negotiated. So the precautions that research stakes could be perceived as independent external advice, have a place at the Governmental decision making level.

Table 4. Attributes of research based evidence

Characteristics	Attributes	Quotation of participants' perceptions and experiences
Appropriate scale and scope	More emphasis on research based evidence in front of stakes representation	…I do not consider myself as a supporter of formal participatory instruments. I am familiar with competent and trusted persons in the field who provide me with expertise… (PA4) …The balance between experts and other interested actors shall be maintained… (S2, university)
	Lack of rigid data	…Some participatory groups have faced requests to complete work based on individual knowledge and intuition, but not on evidence… (S3, expert)
Mutual learning	Lack of mutual learning	…I have to admit, when one knows how to act, no participatory group is necessary…(PA7) …In certain situations researchers are required. But explanation of the objectives and situation to them is time consuming… (PA1) …It happens that my role in participatory groups initially was unclear, but in the course of work tasks pointed up… (S3, university)
	Searching for knowledge	…We share information, I gain new knowledge, establish contacts with specialists on the topic… (S4, university)
Knowledge transfer	One side perception of knowledge transfer	…The result of a participatory group didn't meet our expectations. But to return to the same problem solving lots of work and efforts to convince the ministry are required… (S1, association)

Monitoring and evaluation of participation quality. Monitoring of the participation quality strongly depends on the pattern of participation that covers the individuals, their affiliation and distribution among the stakes they represent. The majority (707 out of 985) of the individuals was engaged into a governmental policy making process once during both years.148 individuals participated twice. Surprisingly there are 7 stakeholders who have been involved in 15-18 participatory groups, 11 actors participated in 11-13 groups,

20 – in 7-10 groups, 92 – in 3-6 groups. Unsurprisingly the majority of those who count more than 7 participation facts yearly are PAs. This data testify an occasional character of application of stakeholders' engagement procedures with limited number of periodically engaged stakeholders.

Interviewed PAs acknowledge that policy makers are not committed to the results achieved in participatory groups. However during participatory process PAs claim to have sought to develop outputs that match different interests (Table 5). Even interviewees other than PAs are positive towards cooperation level at the Ministry. Few of them have experienced some cases when pressure to develop a certain output was applied on members of participatory groups. Some of those involved feel disappointed about the outcomes because the results of work in the participatory group initially were satisfactory, but after administrative procedures final results failed to match the initial ones. Some positive outcomes were stated as well. Such outcomes as new established contacts, gained knowledge, and strengthened cooperation with policy makers are attributed as important advantages of the participatory process.

Table 5. Attributes of monitoring and evaluation of participation quality

Characteristics	*Attributes*	*Quotation of participants' perceptions and experiences*
Level of cooperation and collaboration (pattern of participation and distribution of participation)	Cooperation when the stake is clear	…When policy actors participate with the goal to find solutions, those are found. If such goal is absent, neither participatory group nor other instruments will be effective…(PA6)
	Control over collaboration	…While a group had a task to develop new regulation, some ministerial representatives made efforts to impress a certain opinion on the group… (S3, expert)
Participation outcomes	Outcomes dependency on stake power	…Participation will be effective and real results will be achieved if a sound interest is engaged… (PA4) …All participants remain discontented with outcomes frequently; even adopted regulations appeared to be a compromise. That's because not all aspirations of everybody were achieved… (PA7)
	Alignment of outcomes with the decision making process	…It occurs that participants in the group agree on one solution, but the final result appears to be totally different. Policy makers set requirements. In such case regulations are adopted different than discussed in the participatory group…(S2, university) …The document produced by the participatory group was completely changed. Progressive ideas turned into threats for teachers…(S3, expert)

5. Conclusions

Extensive and deep citizens' participation in policy making is determined by the expression of the attributes of the participatory framework applied within a certain policy making society. Shaping common requirements for participatory approach at the governmental policy level, we propose an actionable participatory framework with certain attributes interrelated. The framework is based on a correct arena for stakes' expression,

completeness of stake representation, balanced stake representation, research based evidence and monitoring and evaluation of participation quality. The completeness of these requirements could help to generate a purposeful and sound participatory process.

The proposed framework of participation lets us look deeper into the participatory practice used by PAs. The findings of our research reveal that PAs at the Ministry mainly give preference to informal communication with stakeholders with the purpose to gain expertise. Stakeholders representing influential organizations introduce their interest directly to policy makers overleaping common participatory procedures. Those findings testify incompleteness of the arena for stakes' representation in terms of transparency, legality, and manageability.

The research partially shows failure to ensure completeness and balance of stakes' representation at the Ministry in seeking to cover the evidence and consultation essentially. There are relatively few representatives other than higher education institutions involved in formal participatory groups. Stakeholders other than PAs mostly are employed by seeking to gain necessary knowledge instead of recognizing and coordinating interests. Although the priority of public interest is recognized by organizers of the participatory process, there are cases when pressing on policy makers or the power of specific interest is applied against less conceptualised interests. As a permanent point of control is permanent monitoring of the participation quality, techniques additional to just a qualitative approach covering different mixed methods let overview the pattern of participants and power distribution of stakes.

Acknowledgment:

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